

# On Sophia Coppola's Marie Antoinette

written by Masha Tupitsyn | June 24, 2014



“Here I am, again”

– *Orlando*, 1992

1. Problems are modern. Dressed up and restored as new but always just painted over.
  2. History is one long going away party.
  3. Decadence is a sign of crisis. Wealth is how you adorn (cover up and decorate) disaster. What you lack immaterially, you create with more material. Too much is never enough because too much is the result of not knowing or feeling what is there in the first place.
  4. Spending as the cost of ruin. “I want you to deal with your problems by becoming rich.” –*The Wolf of Wall Street*. See also Coppola's *The Bling Ring*.
  5. *Marie Antoinette* is concerned with how to perform not-seeing. More precisely, not showing that you see. Which is why Coppola dramatizes gossip. Gossip in the film is not about true or untrue. Actual or invented. It is not about source. Gossip is the thwarting of a kind of epistemology. Everything is knowable and known, not the other way around. What is at stake is immunity.
  6. Before it meant rumor or idle talk, gossip, was godsibb in Old English, which meant “‘sponsor, godparent,’ from God + sibb ‘relative’ (see sibling). Extended in Middle English to “any familiar acquaintance” (mid-14c.), especially to woman friends invited to attend a birth.” In other words, gossip is something you know is being said (about you and others), but have a customary or contractual stake in not knowing you know. It is the equivalent of being a woman.
- Gossip is part of you, familiar, familial, very near (proximate) and even dear because what happens or doesn't happen around us is intimately related.
- Gossip is what you know is happening. In the film the constant murmur of mendacity is audible. The person being gossiped about is always immersed in the treble of the rumor.
7. There are no secrets, my friend once said. Everyone knows (feels) what is being hidden.
  8. The art and etiquette of appearance and appearing. But also: appearing as not-showing. And: not-showing as pretending not to know or see. As in: it is okay to say what one is not supposed to say and hear what one is not supposed

to hear as long as one does not show that one sees and hears. That one is being seen and heard. It is about-face, saving-face. The denial of what is out in the open. Hiding in the open. Open hiding. Invisibility as something you can see; something always in view. We would never have had history, injustice, power, or culture without visible covers and shrouds.

9. In one of the film's key scenes, Marie Antoinette, unable to produce an heir due to her still unconsummated marriage to King Louis the XVI of France, treads through the long corridors of the Versailles palace, through a barrage of clamoring whispers, holding in her shame. She knows that everyone knows she is ashamed and everyone knows that she knows they are shaming her. She is on the brink of tears. Yet she waits to get behind closed doors before she allows herself to weep. Everyone knows and can hear her weeping on the other side of the wall, a thin veil. She is wailing. As long as she abides by the veneer and affectation of privacy, she is free to openly unravel. This is yet another instance of gossip. A woman is not simply behind closed doors. She herself is a *behind closed doors*. A woman must pretend that she does not know that she is being seen and heard. A woman must be the right thing at the right time in the right place(s). In Sally Potter's *Orlando*, based on Virginia Woolf's 1928 sci-fi novel (the future is a gender-bending wormhole), when Orlando is (death)sentenced to gender organization at a certain time and place—the 17<sup>th</sup> century—she enters into a labyrinth as though it were a spaceship, and plunges into gender at another time and place, the 19th century. The labyrinth is also what saves Wendy and Danny from the monster of Fatherhood and Patriarchy in *The Shining*.



10. History is full of party scenes. Getting wasted. Watching the sun come up. Starting and ending love affairs. Again, behind the scenes, the weeping wall, the tall, wild grass around palaces, nothing has ever not-happened. Everything has always been happening.

11. Prematurely (like gray before your time; time that came early) gray hair is the original and coveted history of Beautiful. Life got old so fast and so did beauty. To be as ornamentally old as your ancient wealth, ancient history, ancient life, body.



12. The problem with Coppola is she always humanizes, sentimentalizes, and interiorizes the elite. Tucks it in. The People do not have their noses pressed up against the (this) glass of this/that world. More like, the glass keeps the People entirely out of view. With nothing on the other side of it. There are no outsiders, only insiders.

